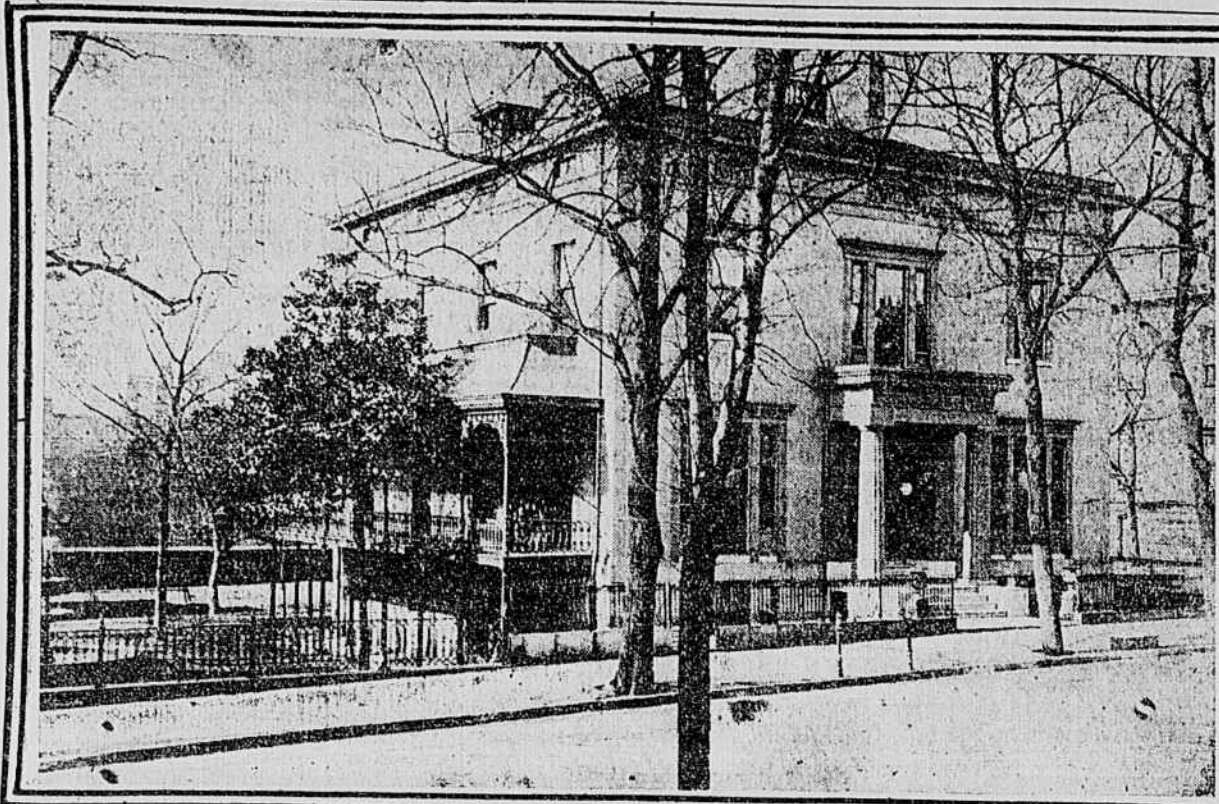


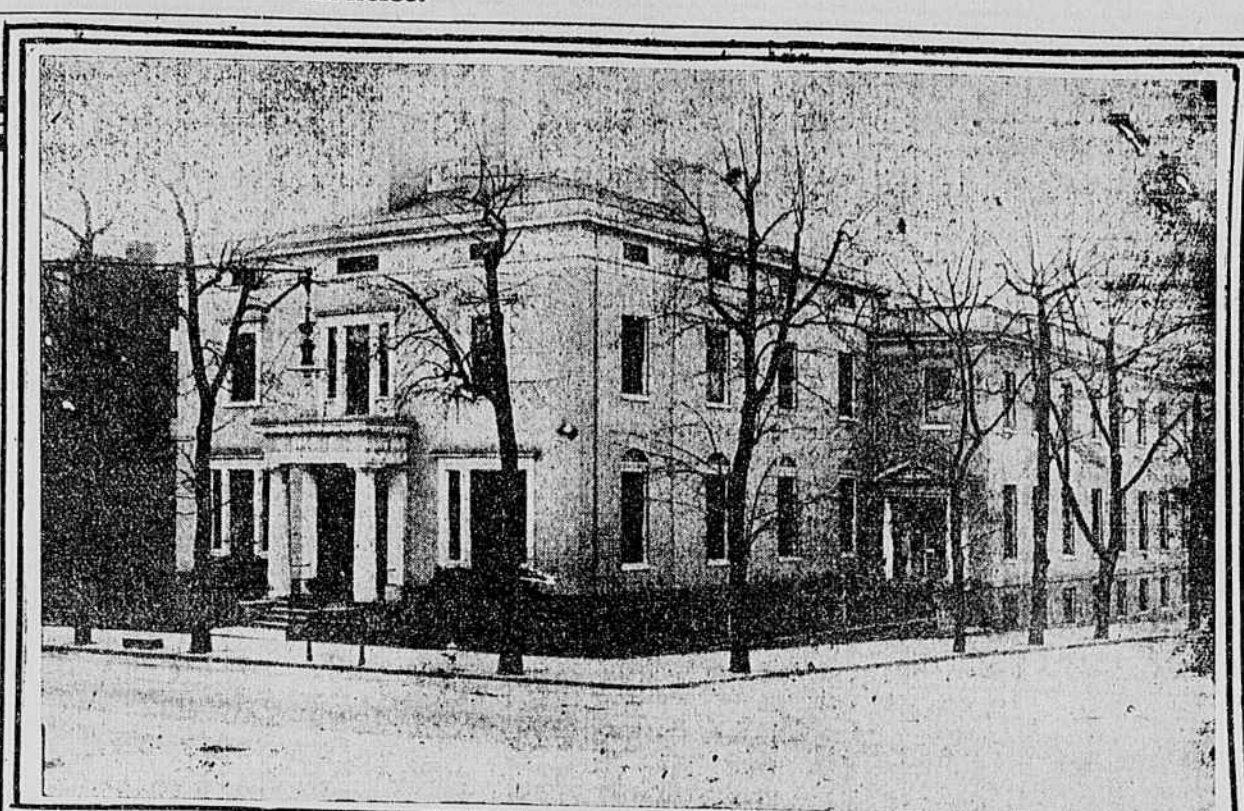
The Westmoreland Club in the History of Richmond From Its Building to the Present Day

By Alice M. Tyler. No. 1. in a Series of Club Articles.



WESTMORELAND CLUB HOUSE AS IT FORMERLY APPEARED, WITH SIDE YARD.

Photograph by H. P. Cook.



WESTMORELAND CLUB HOUSE AS IT APPEARS TO-DAY.

Photograph by H. P. Cook.

In a description of his native city unsurpassed for the picture it creates in the mind, one of Richmond's gifted sons wrote not long before his death: "Such is the beauty of its site and the charm of its landscape, that when Richmond shall become the great manufacturing city of the South—even then it will tempt the wandering artist to take out his portfolio and sketch the outlines of its hills and the tumult of its leaping waters."

Richmond's charm lies largely, as the man knew, in its atmosphere, its picturesque and traditional background, which not even skyscrapers and an utter absence of the luxuriant shrubbery and flowers, distinguishing characteristics of Richmond homes of the early and middle nineteenth century period, have altogether effaced. Here and there still linger amid modern smart surroundings, a house with a history, a house that has all the indefinable influence which in history makes it a part of both past and present exists.

Value of Historic Atmosphere.

That members of the Westmoreland Club, which was so named in motion of John Hampden Chamberlayne, in February of 1887, realized the value of a historic atmosphere, is apparent in their decision on June 16, 1878, to purchase from the Lyons estate, through a special committee, of which Isaac Davenport was chairman, the edifice at the southeast intersection of Grace and Sixth streets.

Built mainly by a man named Boyd, from Baltimore, under the personal direction of the late James Gray, its foundations were laid deep and strong, and durability as well as spaciousness went into the place, which, completed, stands to-day as evidence of Mr. Gray's care in selection of material and vigilance in its construction, and of a certain stability, a defiance of time, in whatever marked Richmond's progress several generations ago.

Neighborhood of Sixth and Grace. Mr. Gray built here in 1857 amid the pleasant surroundings as far as the neighborhood was concerned, the homes of Chancellor Wythe, James Caskie, Thomas Ritchie, Corbin Warwick, Dr. James McClurg and other distinguished people, professionally and socially, being in immediate proximity.

It is said by James Blair, a citizen whose memory is a storehouse of much delightful reminiscence, that the English basement or ground floor of the Westmoreland Club was fashioned by Mr. Gray in its commodiousness with regard to Presbyterian prayer meetings being held

there, public places of worship not then offering the pleasant and convenient invitations of the present, and Mr. Gray being a zealous member of the Presbyterian Church. The Westmoreland yard lot, as purchased by Mr. Gray, included the grounds to the east, on which two residences have been since erected. The willow standing near the fountain in the yard was planted there by Mrs. William Frederick Gray. She brought the slip from Mount Vernon, the tree in the Washington grounds being a transplantation from the grave of Napoleon at St. Helena. **Member of Influential Firm.** Mr. Gray was a leading member of

an influential firm of Richmond tobaccoists, doing business in 1828 under the firm name of Rogers, Harrison & Gray. About that time William Wirt removed to Washington, and Mr. Gray bought the Wirt house, which occupied one hundred and thirty front feet, beginning at the northwest corner of Sixth and Grace. It extended rearward to Broad Street. The Wirt house was two stories in height, and had wings and three porticos across its back and front presentment. It stood well back from the street, or carriage road, the intervening space being filled with beds of the rarest and most fragrant of old-fashioned flowers. At the back was a kitchen

garden, a smokehouse and servants' dwellings, discreetly screened from public view by a leafy box hedge. From this point of vantage, situated where Richmond boys and girls played "hide and seek" under rosebush and syringa covert for hiding places, Mr. Gray looked well and easily after his work at his more pretentious new dwelling across the way.

House Passes to Judge Stannard.

He was occupying it in 1859, when a great and sudden decline in the price of cotton brought with it such heavy losses that he found it expedient to sell to Judge Robert Stannard, of the Virginia Appellate Court, an asset which, as originally planned, still lacked something of completion. The Gray family, however, found themselves very happy to go back to the picturesque Wirt cottage for a few years, until financial losses were retrieved. Then Mr. Gray erected as his permanent home 508 East Grace Street. He was the additional designer and owner of Gray's Row, on Franklin Street, between Second and Third. He was, moreover, a stockholder in a museum then situated about where the fountain now is in the Capitol Square, and certificates of his stock in this enterprise are to be seen at the Valentine Museum.

His Richmond dependants of to-day include the sons of the late Mann S. Valentine, whose wife was a Miss Gray, W. F. Gray, James T. Gray, Edward Gray, Mrs. James A. Moncreux, the families of the late Andrew Gray, of Mrs. Helen Gray Manson and of Mrs. William H. Wirt.

In his completion of the Westmoreland Club building Judge Stannard brought from Italy and ornate furnishings procured by his son, William B. Stannard, in Paris, France. Judge Stannard's law office was in the basement of the house, and here he continued his work until his death on May 14, 1896, he being occupied in the writing of an opinion when his summons came.

His son, Robert C. Stannard, inherited his home. It was a brilliant lawyer, a member of the Virginia Senate and of the Convention of 1861. He married Miss Martha Pierce, of Kentucky, a woman of remarkable beauty, aburnished, tall and stately in figure. Around her in her elegant drawing-room she gathered a wonderful coterie—statesmen, belles and beaux of the day—all delighting in Mrs. Stannard's delightful wit and adroit repartee. William Makepeace Thackeray was a visitor to Richmond in 1855, and it is said, was a dinner guest at Mrs. Stannard's table. And Edward Everett, who came to the city to address the Mount Vernon Association, was also a recipient of her hospitality.

Mrs. Stannard's Widowhood. After Mrs. Stannard became a widow she herself was a great belle, and her hand was sought in marriage by the most eligible men of the day. Her drawing-room was a meeting point for the official life of the Confederacy, and her wartime breakfasts and luncheons were greatly appreciated social affairs. During the closing years of the War between the States Mrs. Stannard disposed of her residence at Sixth and Grace to William H. McFarland

and went to live at the corner of Eighth and Grace. To the last days of her life she maintained a bearing and a grace that rendered her a dominant figure in any company that she entered, and her triumphs in the social world still linger pleasantly in the minds of Richmond citizens who remember her.

A very pleasant incident is related by Mrs. James Chestnut, Jr., of South Carolina, whose husband was a brigadier-general of the Confederate Army and an aid to Jefferson Davis, in her wartime diary, regarding Mrs. Stannard. She says: "Mrs. Stannard came for Mrs. Preston and me to drive to the camp in an open carriage. A man riding a beautiful horse joined us. He wore a hat with something of a military look to it, but his horse gracefully, and was so distinguished at all points that I very much regretted not catching his name as Mrs. Stannard gave it to us. He, however, heard ours, and bowed as gracefully as he rode, and the few remarks he made to each of us showed he knew all about us."

"But Mrs. Stannard was in ecstasies of pleasurable excitement. I felt that she had bargained a big fish, for just then she abounded in Richmond. Mrs. Stannard accused him of being ambitious. He remonstrated in declaring his tastes to be of the simplest. He only wanted a Virginia farm, no end of cream, fresh butter and fried chicken—not one fried chicken or two, but unlimited fried chicken."

"To all this chat did we seriously incline, because the man and horse and everything about him were so fine looking, perfection in fact—no fault to be found if you hunted for it. As he left us, I said eagerly: 'Who is he?' 'You did not know! Why, it was Robert E. Lee, son of Light Horse Harry Lee, the first man in Virginia,' raising her voice as she enumerated his glories."

The McFarland Regime.

The head of one of the most important banking institutions of Richmond, William H. McFarland, who succeeded Mrs. Robert C. Stannard in the ownership of the Westmoreland Clubhouse, continued the prestige of her social reign, he being celebrated both as an influence in the financial world of the sixties, and as the father of a household of lovely daughters. Miss Betty, who married Randolph Barksdale, was one. Another, Miss Turner, became the wife of Wilcox Brown, of Baltimore. Mrs. McFarland

and went to live at the corner of Eighth and Grace. To the last days of her life she maintained a bearing and a grace that rendered her a dominant figure in any company that she entered, and her triumphs in the social world still linger pleasantly in the minds of Richmond citizens who remember her.

Passed to Governor Penn.

From the hands of William H. McFarland the Sixth and Grace Street mansion passed to Governor Penn, of Louisiana, who made of it a splendid gift for his daughter, the young wife of James Lyons, of Laburnum, a suburban mansion which had been burned by the Federals. A mention of the Lyons-Penn wedding, appearing in the Richmond Whig, had the following verse appended, an example of a humorist of the town, who wrote in allusion to the names of the bridal couple:

"Such opposites were ne'er before
In web of Hyman caught.
The forest monarch and the queen
Of all the realms of thought."

As a Representative Citizen.

As a representative citizen, a man of the courtliest manners and a most delightful conversationalist, Mr. Lyons had for equals, no superior. As a host, his urbanity was unsurpassed. Until his retirement from active life was caused by ill-health he was a leading man in all civic and social matters. At Laburnum and later, at Sixth and Grace Streets, he entertained many distinguished people who came to Richmond, being always among those who were appointed to receive and welcome guests of importance to the city.

During the last year of the War Between the States a caller at the Lyons home speaks of a beautiful woman visiting there, the wife of Colonel Penn, at that time in a Northern prison. The visitor remembers that Mrs. Penn had with her a little two-year-old son, to whom she said, "Father comes home," the child pressed his eyes, made himself comfortable, and then laughed about at what he felt to be his supreme performance. When Laburnum, the Lyons country home to the northwest of Richmond, was burned, quantities of costly silver, portraits and priceless furniture were destroyed.

The wife of Senator Louis Trezevant Wirtall, of Texas, writes of being present, early in 1861, at an elegant dinner given herself and her husband by Mr. and Mrs. James Lyons. The party was composed of twenty, and among them were former President John Tyler and General Ben McClellan. "Mrs. Lyons," said Mrs. Wirtall, "is one of the loveliest people I have seen in a long time. Mr. Lyons told me that the people here would never allow the removal of the guns that have been ordered sent to Fort Mifflin. He said that there were about fifty of them, and it was fully determined that the order should not be executed. This—meaning Laburnum—is a fine looking old place and reminds me of Charleston."

Club Ownership.

On October 1, 1879, T. M. R. Talcott and Thomas Seldon, trustees for the Lyons family, concluded arrangements by which the Westmoreland Club came into possession of its present quarters, and on October 26 club members, in a unanimous vote, purchased the building by a unanimous vote.

During the year 1902 the club added to the original building, after removing rear attachments, a billiard and other back rooms in the basement, a sun parlor and dining-room on the main floor, bedrooms on the second and a roof garden.

The first president of the club, elected March 2, 1877, was General Harry Heth. His successors have been William H. Palmer, A. M. Kelley, Dr. J. S. D. Cullen, Dr. James B. McCaw, M. R. Carter Scott, John G. Farland and Eppa Hunton, Jr.

In furnishings and arrangements the Westmoreland Club shows thorough harmony of color and design. Its walls are hung with portraits and rare engravings of great historic value, and on every occasion demanding exercise of hospitality, the club has fulfilled its obligations in the most graceful and generous spirit, so that a proud past is justified by a wonderful present in the annals of the clubhouse history.

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